



# Partnering for the Home Front

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

News about National Park Service (NPS) Partnerships

SPRING 2008

## New Faces and New Partnerships

AS ROSIE THE RIVETER/WWII HOME FRONT NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK sails headlong into 2008, our staff has been working to increase communication and partnerships with a range of individuals, community groups, agencies and other organizations.

This newsletter, a joint effort by the National Park Service (NPS) and our partners, highlights NPS and partners' activities in and around the community that are bringing the national park to life. This issue will fill you in on recent activities, including exciting awards for historic preservation, inspiring



Community leaders tour historic Shipyard No. 3. NPS photo.

oral history collection efforts, and updates on NPS community activities, including the October 4-5, 2008, Home Front Festival. No doubt the festival will one-up our first resoundingly successful Home Front Festival in September 2007, which "launched" the national park and drew hundreds to festivities in historic Richmond. The NPS Home Front Reunion was a highlight for hundreds of home front "veterans" who shared memories and stories with family, friends, and the community.

We are also thrilled to introduce "new" staff members in community outreach who joined our NPS crew in summer 2007 and are now seasoned "deck hands"! Betty Reid Soskin, who many of you know as a long-

time Richmond and East Bay resident and actively engaged community member, is now wearing an NPS ranger uniform. Betty has shared her invaluable life experiences—on the home front and beyond—with the community for many years, and we are de-

lighted she is formally a part of the park team. Carla Koop joined us in July of 2007 as a part-time Public Outreach Coordinator. She has two decades of experience in a variety of community, public and non-profit organizations in Contra Costa, Ala-

meda and Marin counties. This has jump-started her outreach efforts here in Richmond and with communities across the country as we grow to engage a national audience in our stewardship of home front resources.

The New Year brought the appointment of our new Chief of Interpretation, Naomi Torres. Naomi initiated our outreach efforts here at Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front NHP with a National Park Foundation/PG&E grant and was instrumental in the development of our initial community outreach efforts and bus tours. She joins us from her previous position where she was leading the innovative public

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## Got an idea?

Articles about NPS partnerships are welcome! Deadline for Summer issue is June 1, 2008.

Contact: Carla Koop, 510-232-0865, Carla\_koop@nps.gov



## Red Oak Victory Nears a Decade of Restoration

ON A SUNNY MORNING AT LAST SEPTEMBER'S HOME FRONT FESTIVAL, visitors aboard the historic Red Oak Victory ship feasted on tasty pancakes—and feasted their eyes on the new coat of gray paint adorning the ship. Paint and other major improvements to this historic ship—the last of the original 747 built at the four Kaiser shipyards during WWII—are the most recent in a decade of restoration efforts undertaken since the ship returned to the Kaiser shipyards in 2005. These improvements, to be completed this year, are being funded by a \$1 million California Transportation grant and overseen by dedicated volunteers of the Richmond Museum Association, which owns the ship. Other important work underway includes repair of the steam-powered engine, the fire system, and electrical power. Most important—guests will soon enjoy indoor plumbing!

The Red Oak Victory—named for Red Oak, Iowa, which bore the most WWII casualties for a town of its size—bears unique testimony to the labors of the over 90,000 men and women who came to work in the shipyards and other essential industries in Richmond during WWII. The Richmond shipyards and over 30 others in the Bay Area, played a key role in establishing the U.S. as the “Arsenal of Democracy.”

The Kaiser shipyards produced the most ships of any shipyard in the U.S. during WWII, turning out at peak production one a day. Henry J.

Kaiser, who had never built a ship prior to WWII, initiated groundbreaking innovations that transformed shipbuilding from a labor-intensive process taking over a year to one that lasted about a month. One Kaiser shipyard competition built and

launched the Robert E. Peary in 1942 in less than 5 days—a record-breaking speed to this day.

NPS is proud to partner with the Richmond Museum of History to help preserve and interpret the Red Oak Victory ship in its his-

toric setting. The public can visit the ship and surrounding historic sites, including the huge art-deco General Warehouse, the awesome ten-story tall Whirley Crane, and other structures built to facilitate the quick pre-assembly of ship parts—all still standing thanks to Henry J. Kaiser, who built Shipyard No. 3 as the only permanent one of four in Richmond during the war. To learn more, call 510-237-2933 or visit <http://ssredoakvictory.org/>. The ship is open for



Volunteers make repairs to the SS Red Oak Victory. Photo courtesy Richmond Museum of History.



The Red Oak Victory gleams with new paint funded by a CALTRANS grant. Photo courtesy Richmond Museum of History.

self-guided visits Sat., Sun., Tu., Th. 10 am – 4 pm (call ahead to confirm).

—Donald Bastin  
Richmond Museum of History

## Richmond “Awards” its History

THE CITY OF RICHMOND HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE invites nominations for the 2008 Richmond Historic Preservation awards. The purpose of the program is to recognize the people, places and publications that preserve and celebrate Richmond’s amazing history. Projects need to have been completed on or before December 31, 2008, to be eligible for an award in this round. In addition, the National Park Service through Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front NHP will recognize a home front project, publication or event that preserves or celebrates Richmond’s World War II-era story.

Nomination forms are available online at <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us>. Enter “award” in the “Search” box to find a form that can be downloaded to your printer. Printed copies of the forms may also be picked up at the city of Richmond Planning and Building Services Department. Nominations are due to City of Richmond Planning and Building Services Department, 1401 Marina Way South, Richmond, California, 94804, by close of business Monday, March 31, 2008. Awards will be presented at an event Friday afternoon, May 16—during National Historic Preservation Month—at the Richmond Museum of History. Questions should be directed to Lina Velasco, senior planner for the City of Richmond. She may be reached at 510-620-6841 or [lina\\_velasco@ci.richmond.ca.us](mailto:lina_velasco@ci.richmond.ca.us).

—Lucy Lawliss, NPS



## Lost Conversations and Untold Stories

**IT NEVER DAWNED ON ME** – while filing change-of-address cards or taking dues payments in the small office of the racially segregated Boilermakers A-36 union hall – that I might live long enough to actually *become* black history – but so it seems. Despite a fading memory of the unassuming office at 10<sup>th</sup> and Barrett Avenue in Richmond, California during WWII, life has placed a soapbox under my feet, and here I am speaking publicly for a generation that helped save the world from Nazi imperialism. At times I’m uncomfortable with the “Rosie” name that is often associated with the white, middle-class women portrayed in WWII recruiting posters, for it fits neither my own history nor the fully equal future some of us worked, fought, and in some cases, died for.

I worked in downtown Richmond not far from the shipyards, but for me it was a world apart. Ninety-eight thousand home front workers moved in and out of the Kai-

ser shipyards 24-hours-a-day and 7-days-a-week in one of the most intensive production efforts in human history. But as a union file clerk, I never saw a ship under construction, never witnessed a launching. Nor do I recall feeling the surge of patriotism that inspired the monumental achievement of completing 747 ships in Richmond in less than 5 years of war.

As a 20-year old, politically naïve African American woman with little understanding of the war except for the disruption it brought to everyday life, I felt overwhelmed and confused. It was as if a major fault line had shifted under the weight

of the unprecedented population explosion that changed the social fabric of the Bay

Area, the west coast, and the nation for all time.

My confusion was also driven by still-raw memories of a nation that assigned 90% of black women to service work in limited areas of – agriculture, households, and industry. To be allowed to do clerical work – menial though it was – in a Jim Crow union hall, was a step up from making beds, caring for children, and mopping floors for white Americans.

But time tends to soften, alter, and revise our understanding

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NPS Ranger Betty Soskin holds a photo of herself as a young file clerk working in a segregated union hall during WWII. Photo: MediaNews

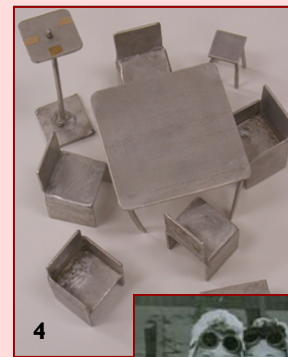
## HIDDEN TREASURES



This collage shows some of the many items in the NPS museum collection, including photos, uniforms, badges, tools, and artwork that have been donated by men and women who



worked on the WWII home front. These items will eventually be displayed at the NPS visitor center in the Ford Building. Watch for the next issue of this newsletter, which will feature an article about the museum collection.



**L to R:** (1) Nevaire Gambrell worked as a draftsman at Curtiss-Wright in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1944. Donated by Nevaire Richardson. (2) Delmar Olson worked in surveying and engineering at C.M.S.T.P. and P. Railroad for 3 years and saved this training book. Donated by Virginia Olson. (3) Beatrice Keller worked as a journeyman burner at Richmond Shipyard No. 2 from 1942-43 and donated her employee badge. (4) Frances LaBelle, an aluminum welder at Grumman in Port Washington, New York, for 2 years, donated doll furniture made of scrap metal. (5) Bennice Vick Russell, pictured on the left, was a burner at Brown Shipyard in Houston, Texas, from 1943-45. Her sister-in-law is pictured with her. Donated by Vicki Russell.



**ROSIE THE RIVETER /  
WORLD WAR II HOME FRONT**  
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

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Phone: 510-232-5050 Fax: 520-232-5504  
[www.nps.gov/rori/](http://www.nps.gov/rori/)

Do you or a family member  
have a home front story?  
Submit it to the NPS collection!  
Call 510-307-8702.

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of history, and my home front story is no exception. As a new park ranger for the National Park Service, I find myself invited to speak for that generation – to share stories of the times (and there are as many stories as there are workers who lived them) – to many groups, large and small. Over the past months I've been invited to participate in black and women's history observances for organizations as diverse as the Daughters of the American Revolution and elementary schools from Berkeley to Bakersfield.

Does it feel real? Have I learned to accept my role as spokesperson for a period in history which holds painful and often humiliating memories? Oddly enough, the answer is yes. I find these audiences ready to explore the era with an openness that holds promise for continuing change.

Rosie the Riveter/ World War II Home Front NHP is working to tell all of these stories, full of pain and pride, in its public programs. A video about the African-American experience, *Lost Conversations and Untold Stories*, is available to the public. The park also holds special public tours to showcase the variety of stories that are all part of the rich home front story, and continues to develop new partnerships and programs.

Perhaps the trajectory of my life from a young, confused, and disenfranchised union hall clerk to park ranger on a soap-box illustrates—much as today's campaign for the presidency between a woman and an African American does—how far we've come in the process of growing our democracy.

—Betty Reid Soskin, NPS

## Look for NPS this summer!

**May 3 - Cinco de Mayo Parade**, Richmond to San Pablo.

**May 10 - Jr. Ranger Day** - see notice below.

**June 21 - Juneteenth celebration**, Nicholl Park, Richmond.

**October 4-5 - Home Front Festival**, Richmond.



## The "Greatest Generation" tells its Home Front Stories

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE is pleased to announce that Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home NHP is receiving a fourth year of National Park Service Challenge Cost Share funds in order to continue an oral history partnership with the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) of the University of California-Berkeley, Bancroft Library. To date, these remarkable first-person accounts of life in the East Bay during World War II have been the most in-depth oral histories gathered by the park. Participants have been documented by video and audio recordings as well as with written transcripts. These and other biographical stories are the beginning of an invaluable research and education collection that will be available at the national park, the ROHO website, and the Richmond public library. If you know of anyone who has a home front story to tell, please contact the park at 510-232-5050.

—Lucy Lawliss, NPS

## Join us!

**Jr. Ranger Day**

**Saturday, May 10, 2008**

**9:30 am - 12:30 pm**

**Berryland at Greenway & 6th St., Richmond**

**Learn about WWII Victory gardens & help transform an old railroad route into a living corridor of edible fruits & vegetables.**

Activities include community planting, garden games, sign painting, and an activity table where kids can earn Jr. Ranger certificates and patches!

**Contact:** Carla Koop, 510-232-0865, [carla\\_koop@nps.gov](mailto:carla_koop@nps.gov) or Park Guthrie, [park@urbantilth.org](mailto:park@urbantilth.org). Visit [www.urbantilth.org](http://www.urbantilth.org) and go to May calendar.



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outreach team at the Crissy Field Center, a part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Naomi brings extensive experience in interpretation, community outreach, and educational programs for urban youth, all of which are key to our efforts here in Richmond.

As the National Park Service forges ahead for a great 2008, we hope that you will join us in "partnering for the home front...past, present and future!" Feel free to contact Carla Koop with ideas for partnerships and collaboration.

—Martha J. Lee, NPS 